

Kāṭṭo khuvāune:

Two Brahmins for Nepal's Departed Kings

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The massacre at Nārāyaṇahiṭī Royal Palace in Kathmandu on Friday evening, 1 June 2001, left the country bereft not only of its king but also a good part of the royal family. Three days later the state-owned Nepal Radio officially announced the death of Crown Prince Dipendra, who had been declared the new king while lying unconscious in hospital, with his uncle, Gyanendra, acting as regent ad interim. Only half an hour later, at 11 a.m., the same radio station together with Nepal TV reported live from Nasalchowk, Hanumandhoka, where the *siṃhāsanārohaṇa* ceremony, the 'accession to the royal lion-throne' was about to be performed on Gyanendra, the late King Birendra's younger brother. A chain of events beyond anyone's imagination was underway that would leave the whole of Nepal's citizenry in a state of shock. The breakdown of ideals embedded in a royal tradition that spans the politico-religious history of the country created a vacuum of values and orientations that will not easily be filled up again.

Amidst the chaos, the palace priests had to concentrate on completing the funeral rituals for the untimely departed kings and eight other members of the royal family. A good number of the mortuary rituals prescribed for the first thirteen days after death did not differ from the practice common to upper-status Hindus, but the 11th day offered one exception in the form of a bewildering ritual called *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*. A local brahmin consumed an elaborate meal, was then dressed and ornamented as the late king, showered with presents, and finally sent away on an elephant. He was not only supposed to leave his family forever but also the valley. Not least because its concluding part took an unexpected turn, heated debates arose concerning whether or not such a practice was in accordance with present-day conceptions of kingship and ongoing tradition.

The following overview of the death rituals performed will provide a description of the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* ('accepting of the *kāṭṭo* meal') or *kāṭṭo khuvāune* ('feeding of the *kāṭṭo* meal') as performed for the two kings. The underlying concepts and beliefs requiring a brahmin to be sent off as a despised *kāṭṭe* for the rest of his life require some explanation. Ritual elements – specific forms of *dāna* ('gift-giving') and *brāhmaṇa bhojana* ('feeding of brahmins') – observable at a very critical stage of the postmortuary process harbour some of the answers. Rumours that remains from the late king's funeral pyre were added to the *kāṭṭo* dishes call for additional explanation. The same holds for the selection of the brahmin undergoing *kāṭṭo-*

grahaṇa. On which *śāstras* is this whole practice based, and how is it understood with respect to its ritual context within a Nepalese setting? What about the historical sources of the tradition – in particular, its exclusiveness to kings? And finally: What about its future? The *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* struck many contemporary Nepalis as a strange ritual relic. Its actual performance and the growing controversy in its aftermath not only indicate a tendency for rituals to be critically questioned by the populace, they also point towards an increasing pressure on ritual processes to conform to rational criteria.¹

The ritual framework

As the schedule of events shows, the death rituals for both kings evince a pattern common to present-day upper-class Hindu communities (see Tables 1 and 2).²

The funeral processions for King Birendra and Dipendra from the Military Hospital in Chauni to Paśupati and their subsequent cremations (*dāhasaṃskāra*) were completed within one day after death. Ārya-ghāṭ on the bank of the Bagmati River, below the western gate of Paśupatināth temple, is the cremation *ghāṭ* for Kathmandu's royalty,³ while Kālamocana-ghāṭ in the southern part of Kathmandu has been the chosen *ghāṭ* for *antyeṣṭi* and *śrāddha* rituals since the Śāhas.⁴ It was in this latter location that the *karmakriyā* rituals of the following days were performed by the *kriyāputra*,⁵ including the daily offering of a *piṇḍa* in order to progressively create a subtle body (*sūkṣmaśarīra*) for the *pretātman*.⁶

¹ If not specified or obvious from the context, the technical terms are given in their Sanskrit stem forms, ignoring proper declination. Local names are reproduced in English spelling if so encountered. I am very grateful to Philip Pierce for revising my English and notifying me of inconsistencies, and to Dinesh Raj Pant for reviewing my Nepali transcriptions.

² For the details provided, I have relied on information kindly shared by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita, *rājapurohita* and Joint Secretary at the Darbar *pūjā-koṭhā*.

For a more detailed description of day-by-day *antyeṣṭi* and *śrāddha* rituals similar to the pattern documented here, see Levy & Rājopādhyāya (1992: 677-686), Toffin (1979), Michaels (1998: 148-75), Bennett (1983: 92-123) and Parry (1985: 614-624).

³ The stone platform at Ārya-ghāṭ, where kings have been cremated since medieval times, is called *rājadīpa*. The royal burning *ghāṭs* of the Patan and Bhaktapur Malla kings were Saṅkhamūla- and Hanumānghāṭ respectively. See Regmi (1965: 710).

⁴ *Antyeṣṭi* or *antyakarma* denotes the final compulsory life-cycle ritual. It covers the period between dying and attaining the state of an ancestor (*pitr*) – in the context discussed here, up to the twelfth day after death. On this day *sapiṇḍikaraṇa*, the ritual joining of the deceased to his forefathers, takes place.

The following *śrāddha* consists of a series of memorial and offering rituals performed in honour and for the benefit of the ancestors. Some of these rituals are undertaken upon the completion of *sapiṇḍikaraṇa*; others will only be performed after *ābdika-śrāddha* one year later.

⁵ The duties of the *kriyāputra* are generally assumed by the eldest son. If there is no son, another close relative may be appointed for this task. In the case of the royal family, a relative performed this duty for the late King Birendra and Queen Aishvarya. For the sons and the late king's youngest brother Dhirendra, brahmins serving in the Royal Nepalese Army were hired. The eldest son of a king and heir to the throne is allowed neither to assume the duties

As one act of the final day of the *kriyā* period, a piece of the dead king's skull was brought to a *śrāddha-tīrtha*⁷ for submersion. For generations of Nepal's kings a *tīrtha* at the banks of Kālīgaṇḍakī River close to Riḍī has been chosen to perform *asthipravāha* ('consigning the bones to the waters'). The eleventh-day *kāṭṭo khuvāune* ('feeding of disgraced food') or *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* ('accepting disgraced food'), on which this paper will focus, attracted a huge number of media people, among them many foreigners who had rushed into the country to reap their share of reports and rumours.⁸

On June 13, one day after the eleventh-day rituals of King Birendra, a rather unnoticed aspect of the traditions relating to the death of kings came to an end in the premises of the old royal palace at Hanumandhoka. All morning the *Rājaguru-jyu*, Puṣparatna Vajrācārya,⁹ along with his *gurumā* (priestly wife) and chief officers distributed *ṭīkā* and coins to beggars, street-dwellers, homeless children, *sādhus* (holy men), hermits and pilgrims who happened to drop in to Nasalchowk. On their departure the latter were presented with bags containing foodstuffs (rice, sweets, salt) topped with a one-rupee bill. These materials had been presented to the old palace during the previous days by individuals and by governmental and private organizations within town and from surrounding villages as part of *bicā hayegu* (New. 'obtaining the reason', Nep. *bicāra lyāune*).¹⁰

of a *kriyāputra* nor to attend the rituals of the first thirteen days, because of the impurity involved.

⁶ *Preta* is used to denote the ghostly existence in transition, which 'lost' its gross human body at cremation but has not still entered the realm of the ancestors. *Pretātman* embodies the concept of an individual's *ātman* as a never-dying animate entity, at times joined to a gross body, then again to the all-encompassing, universal 'soul', *ātman*, or essence, *Brahman*. With *pretatva* I distinguish a state of a *preta* that is already provided with a new, subtle body through the first days' *piṇḍa* offerings, but has not yet reached *pitṛloka*, which is supposed to happen after one year only.

⁷ Within Nepal there are several *śrāddha-tīrthas*, confluences of rivers conceived as specially favourable places to perform rituals relating to ancestor worship. Additionally, North Indian *śrāddha-tīrthas* like Varanasi, Gaya or Haridvar are visited for similar purposes by Nepalis.

⁸ The funeral processions and cremations of King Birendra and, three days later, of King Dipendra were broadcast live by both Nepal TV and Radio Nepal. The media and public were strictly kept away from the rituals of all other days. No details of individual rituals were therefore reported.

⁹ During the Malla reign, Newar Buddhist Vajrācāryas and Newar Hindu Rājopadhyāyas officiated as *rājagurus* (royal teachers/advisers) and *rājapurohitas* (royal family priests). Nowadays their importance for the royal palace is limited to specific ritual functions.

¹⁰ This is a tradition followed since Malla times at the demise of a king, mainly in order to learn about the circumstances of death. A readapted form of it is common among Newar and Pārbate (non-Newar Hindu) communities up to today, as a condolence visit to the family of the deceased, who are provided with foodstuffs they are allowed to eat during the first seven (for Banre/Bare, the highest-status Newar Buddhists) or twelve (for Newar Hindus and Pārbate) days of the *āśauca* (polluted) period respectively.

The thirteenth-day *śuddhaśānti* rituals performed at Nārāyaṇahiṭī Royal Palace were delayed for the late king, queen, and prince Nirajan since it was not appropriate to have them performed with Dipendra's rituals still at the *kriyā* stage.¹¹

The *śuddhaśānti* jointly performed for the late king, the queen, and their two sons consisted of a fire sacrifice (*gr̥hyaśāntihoma*) to pacify all kinds of cosmological and other spirit-like forces and to purify the palace and its inhabitants. A further element included a variety of gift offerings to various recipients. According to the *antya-paddhatis*,¹² *vaitaraṇīdāna*, *kapilādāna*, and *pañcadhenudāna* are normally part of the ritual prescriptions with death approaching.¹³ As this was not possible under the circumstances, they were rescheduled for the concluding day of the *kriyā* period (see Table 2). *Durmānaśānti* ('pacification of an upset or sad mind'), including a gift of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa to a brahmin, was the only ritual additionally performed for the untimely and unnatural death of the royals.¹⁴ The *uttama ṣoḍaśa* ('highest sixteen'), the third group of sixteen *piṇḍa*-offerings, is to be made within one year, the first *piṇḍa* having been offered on the eleventh day.¹⁵ This series of *śrāddha* offerings will be done after every month, with additional ones after forty-five lunar days (*tripakṣika piṇḍa*), one to five days before completing six months (*unaṣānmāsika piṇḍa*) and one to five days before completing one year (*unābdika piṇḍa*).¹⁶ With the performance of *ābdika śrāddha* after one year, the *preta* is considered to have finally attained the realm of the ancestors (*pitṛloka*), having completed its arduous journey through the *narakas*, a series of underworlds under Yama's control awaiting the *pretatva*, confronting it with sometimes terrible tortures.¹⁷

¹¹ As the late king's youngest brother Dhirendra was deprived of his royal status in 1989, and had no home in Nepal at the time of his death, his *śuddhaśānti* was performed at Kālamocana-ghāṭ again.

¹² *Antyeṣṭi*- or *antya-paddhatis* are ritual manuals containing prescriptions of mortuary and postmortuary rituals up to one year after death.

¹³ These and further variants of gifting one or several cows with death approaching are understood both as means to complete the person's *karma* and to provide support for the journey towards final release. Besides the high esteem given to any *godāna* ('gift of a cow'), the names of the cows gifted here refer to specific forms of assistance provided according to mythical accounts. They are done only symbolically by common people.

¹⁴ A *saptāha*, a seven-day reading of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa is repeatedly organized by households or in public with the aim of providing *mokṣa* ('liberation') to unreleased souls and of getting rid of obstacles.

¹⁵ The second set of sixteen *piṇḍas* (*madhya ṣoḍaśa*), are offered to various deities and to the *preta* on the eleventh day.

¹⁶ For the majority of rituals, the lunar calendar is followed. According to Darbar (and Pārbate) tradition, the one-year mourning period ends the same lunar month and day as death occurred in the previous year. For V.S. 2058 an extra 30-day lunar month, called *adhikamāsa*, *malmāsa* or *puruṣottama-māsa*, was added between *Āśvina-kṛṣṇa*- and *Āśvina-śuklapakṣa* (September 18 to October 16, 2001). Therefore the completion of *uttama ṣoḍaśa* will take place only after 390 lunar days – for Birendra, on *Jyeṣṭha śukla daśamī* V.S. 2059, the lunar month and *tithi* of his death.

¹⁷ Some of the most essential sources on this subject are discussed in Kane (1977: 1547ff).

The royal palace further keeps the calendrical days dedicated to ancestor worship generally observed within the Valley. The *Gāi-jātrā* was celebrated for the deceased members of the royal family according to Kathmandu custom. On *Bālācaturdaśī* (fourteenth lunar day of the dark fortnight of Mārgaśīrṣa/December) a light for each of the past year's deceased is kept burning all night at Paśupati and immersed the next morning in the Bagmati.¹⁸ The duty to perform *śrāddha* does not end after the first year. With every year completing another annual ceremony (*ekoddiṣṭa śrāddha*) will be performed in the name of the deceased. Additionally, during the dark half of the month of Āśvina/September all the deceased are remembered on the tithi (lunar day) of their death (*ṣoḍaśa śrāddha*). The *śrāddhas* performed at *Mātā-tīrtha* (on the new moon day of Vaiśākha/April, for female ancestors) and at *Gokarṇa-tīrtha* (on the new moon day of Bhādra/August, for male ancestors) respectively, give proof of another local element taken up by the Darbar priests.

For all the rituals, be they related to *karmakāṇḍa* (life-cycle rites) of the members of the royal family or to ritual acts associated with the institution of the king, the Darbar *mūlapurohita* has a team of seven *rājapurohitas* ('royal house-priests'), the priestly body appointed by the palace, at his disposal. Among them, Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita is currently serving as *hākim upācārya rājapurohita* (Joint-Secretary). The officiating *mūlapurohita*, at present Rameśa Rāja Pāṇḍe, further acts as an adviser in matters of *dharma* (Hindu religious law) towards the *Rāja Pariṣad*, the executive body of the palace. Another key function is held by the royal astrologer, currently Maṅgalarāja Jośī. He decides on the timing of every ritual function and also discharges many more advisory duties relating to the palace and the priests. For the death rituals of the deceased royals, additional brahmins were appointed for several of the ritual tasks.

In addition to the rituals under the supervision of the palace, a series of further condolence and mourning events was organized all over the country. These programmes included memorial speeches, wishes for the peace of the the deceased (*ciraśānti* – 'long-lasting or eternal peace'), recitals, *bhajan* (sacred tunes), and a minute's silence (*maunadhāraṇa*).¹⁹ Rituals performed for *ciraśānti* included *rudrī* (Skt. *rudrābhiṣeka*), fire sacrifice (*homa/havana*) and readings from the Bhāgavatapurāṇa or recitations of Caṇḍīpāṭha or Śāntivedapāṭha. The *Durgatī-pariśodhanadhāraṇipāṭha* was recited by Newar Buddhist communities on several occasions, Tibetan monks chose *Paritrāṇa-pāṭha* for prayer. Lamas organized memorial programmes in various monasteries and in front of Svayambhū Caitya. Another common ritual expression of mourning and well-wishing in the name of the deceased consisted of large-scale displays of lights (*savālākh/eklākh battibālne, śāntidīpa*). On the occasion of several such meetings food was distributed to a large number of poor people. Obviously very popular among individuals were offerings of

¹⁸ On this festival see Michaels (1999).

¹⁹ Some of these events included wishes for the prosperous reign of the new king.

floral tributes (*śraddhāñjalidarpaṇa*) at altars built up at crossroads, within temple compounds and, most prominently, inside the main gate of Nārāyaṇhiṭī palace. A variety of photographs, most showing the late King Birendra and Queen Aishvarya, were displayed and worshipped with lights and incense at such altars. Sometimes pictures of the whole royal family were displayed, or else portraits of each of the ten departed royals lined up in a row. At several places *śok-pustakā* ('mourning-books') allowed visitors to express their sorrow and wishes in written form. All these books were collected and stored inside the Darbar palace.

Newspapers appeared for several days with extra inserts exclusively containing condolence messages, some covering a double page. Large-scale public fire sacrifices (*mahāyajña*) with a full-day programme of speeches, readings, recitals and *bhajana* were organized at Tundikhel (nine days) and in Deopatan (eleven days), and similar programmes were reported from other places in Nepal.

The eleventh-day *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*

With the completion of the *kriyā* period that furnishes the preta with a subtle body after the loss of the mortal, gross one, another critical transitional period begins.²⁰ The eleventh day aims at satisfying the *preta*'s material needs, which are presumed to have become virulent at this stage. By fulfilling all those wishes, one hopes that he will finally abandon his previous surroundings and renounce his former this-worldly desires. The *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* is a ritual consequence of this belief.

For the two kings, Queen Aishvarya, Prince Nirajan, and King Birendra's brother Dhirendra, a *śayyādāna* ('offering of a bed') was prepared at Kālamocana-ghāṭ as an essential part of the eleventh-day rituals. An additional component of the eleventh-day *śayyādāna* was the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*, which was exclusively performed for the two deceased kings, for King Birendra on June 11, for King Dipendra on June 14. The following description holds for both days as the ritual was almost identical in its outlook and order of events.

At 10.45 a.m., the army opened the temporary gates formed by army tents and barriers to receive officials invited to attend the *kāṭṭo khuvāune*. Some corners were designated for the press which was admitted only with an entry permit issued by the palace. Attention was focussed on one tent whose front was open. It was furnished with all kinds of articles one would expect to find in a middle-class apartment. The living-room contained comfortable chairs, a table, fan, and TV, behind a desk with reading lamp. A house altar bore various deities' pictures, lined up on the back wall. To the right, somewhat hidden from view, was the kitchen, with all kinds of metal cooking ware, a stove, plates, and a dining area on the floor. The bedroom was

²⁰ Michaels (1998: 157) gives an illustrative overview of the stages up to the realm of the ancestors.

furnished with a bed, a mosquito net hanging from the top, and a corner table exposing a number of precious items in silver and gold. On the bed, somewhat styled into a throne with the help of cushions and covers, an imitation crown was placed, together with a photograph of the deceased king. Were it not for all those baskets with gifts of grains, pulses, vegetables, potatoes, fruits and – somehow out of place – a goat's shank arranged in between a variety of plates displaying sweets, one could imagine being at a theatre performance. As if to discourage such thoughts, a signboard to the left announced that these were the materials to be offered with the 'bed-gift' of the king on the eleventh day.²¹



The brahmin sitting on the bed throne, equipped with some of the late King Birendra's personal belongings.



Departure on the elephant, heading for Jawalakhel.

Some of the priests and palace officials, all similarly dressed, were busy getting everything ready for the brahmin to be led in at any moment. One did not have to wait long for him to appear. Dressed in a white *dhoti* and wearing the *janāi*,²² he was

²¹ The note for King Birendra's *śayyādāna* reads: 'sva. śrī 5 mahārājādhirāj birendra bīra vikrama śāha-ko 11 au. dīnko śaiyā dāna ko sāmāna'. The 'bed-gift' materials for King Birendra's eleventh day. The same note was written for Dipendra's 'bed-gift', with his name substituted.

²² Nep., sacred thread worn by the three upper castes as twice-born Hindus.

guided to the kitchen corner and took his seat on a square wooden board facing plates containing the eighty-four varieties of dishes (*caurāsī vyañjana-khānā*) he was to eat. All officials invited got up from their chairs in the shade of another tent to greet him. Once they had assumed their seats again he began to eat, while two or three officials watched him closely. When he finished his meal he cleaned his mouth in the 'bathroom' section to the centre and then moved to the 'bedroom', where he exchanged his *dhotī* for a golden-red garment, attended by priests who sprayed perfume, handed over his robe and socks, and then adjusted his belt and *khukurī* (a traditional Gorkhali knife). Golden ornaments, shoes, sunglasses, and a walking stick completed his attire, some items being the late king's personal belongings.

Finally an imitation of the white-plumed royal crown was placed on his head. Posing in full dress and ornamentation on the bed-throne, he was now ready to receive a second procession of officials for the farewell. Another picture session was inserted for the media people, who were fighting among each other for an unspoiled view. The brahmin was then escorted under a red umbrella to an elephant waiting for him outside. Once he had climbed up to the royal saddle on top, the richly painted and heavily laden animal was driven towards the Bagmati River by two attendants dressed in dark green. On the far shore of the river thousands of people awaited them. Nor did public attention lessen on the way to the *kāṭṭe-pāṭī* in Jawalakhel/ Lalitpur, where they were to stay for few days.²³ Once the brahmin had gone, officials and family members started packing up the goods left behind in the tent. A printed three-page list helped to keep account of all the gifts made to the brahmin.

During their stay in Jawalakhel for the following days, Durgāprasāda Sāpkoṭā and Devīprasāda Ācārya, the two brahmins who had accepted the *kāṭṭo* for King Birendra and Dipendra respectively, were shielded from the public and media by army personnel. Both of them were expected to leave the valley on their elephants on Saturday, with the completion of the thirteenth-day rituals at the palace. But to everybody's surprise they were brought back to their separate homes (both live close to the Paśupati temple area) on Sunday afternoon in a van belonging to the Lalitpur district police. The official explanation of this decision centred on the brahmins' refusal to leave the Valley unless they were provided with a new house and lands to live on – such having been part of the gifts made to *kāṭṭe* brahmins in former times.

Press reports provided some general information on the background of *kāṭṭo khuvāune*. As *The Rising Nepal* stated, "the eleventh-day rituals are performed to cleanse the omen of the dead soul and for its eternal journey". The ritual was elsewhere described as "*svargabāsirājā-ko ātma-lāi mokṣā dilāune karma-saṃskāra*" ('life-cycle ritual duty that allows *mokṣa* to be conferred on the king's *ātman* in heaven') or as being performed for the *ciraśānti* of the king. Further it was

²³ The *kāṭṭe-pāṭī* is a specific shelter close to the Patan zoo. At least since the death of King Tribhuvan the brahmins used to stay there for some days to rest and sell the goods they could not use.

stated that according to *hindudharmaparamparā* ('Hindu tradition') *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* was part of the eleventh-day rituals to satisfy the *pretātman's bhoga*.²⁴ Nobody knew whether it was a part of the brain, a piece of the skull, or some bone of the head ground into powder, but everyone was convinced that some part of the king's dead body had been transferred from the funeral pyre to the brahmin's *kāṭṭo* meal. The need for the *kāṭṭe* brahmin in theory to be subsequently sent far from the confines of the Valley was mostly reported as a consequence of his impure state, which implied that nobody wanted to meet him or even knowingly live nearby. One could also read that the loss of both his personal and ritual status would force him to find another source of income somewhere else once the gifts and valuables received were exhausted. The brahmin's departure on the elephant's back in full royal regalia was further understood as a ritual analogy to the king's return to Vaikuntha, the realm of Viṣṇu.²⁵

The little background and commentary provided by reports was rather vague or even contradictory. All in all, the information gained from both local and international media contributed little to an understanding of the meaning and history of *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*.

The tradition of *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*

The following sections will inquire into the tradition of *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* as performed for Nepal's deceased kings. Questions relating to the actual meaning of the term *kāṭṭo*, the existence of manuals on the ritual, and its local history and setting will precede an analysis of the core elements of the ritual. The *kāṭṭo* meal and the gifts will be contextualized within the distinct ritual categories of *brāhmaṇa-bhojana* and *dāna*.

The Nepali dictionaries consulted describe *kāṭṭo* as (a) a term related to *kriyā* (or *kiriyā*) or, more specifically, the *pretaśrāddha* of the eleventh day; (b) the food offered on this day to the *preta* (*pretako bhojana*); (c) the gifts offered on this day. The semantic field further includes (d) food one is forced to eat, and, finally, somewhat oddly, (e) a cat's excrement. Accordingly, *kāṭṭe* denotes the brahmin who eats the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo* as well as being a disdainful form of address applied to him thereafter. The *Ratna nepālī śabdakośa* further cites *kāṭṭo* as a term used for the tissue taken from the skull of the dead during cremation. In daily parlance it is a common form of address to express great disrespect, with a strong sense of disgust. The word *kāṭṭo* derives from Old Indo-Aryan **kaṭṭa-*, a sideform of *kiṭṭa-* 'secretion'

²⁴ *Bhoga* here denotes not only suffering from hunger and thirst, but also the longing for material goods and social relations enjoyed while living.

²⁵ Every Nepali is familiar with the notion of the king not only being a human ruler, but also an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

and *kīṭa*- ‘feces’. It appears also in Nepali *kaṭ* ‘matter rejected during the making of rice-spirit’.²⁶

During the official part of *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* no element of a *pūjā*, be it the reciting of a text, the offering of flowers or incense, or the applying of a *ṭikā*, may be observed. Though some *rājapurohitas* were present and guided each of the two brahmins through his tasks, they were outwardly indistinguishable from other officials present. One is led to believe that there is no clear-cut *vidhi* but rather a tradition which re-adapts itself every time this ritual is performed after the death of a king.

As stated by the royal priests on duty, no such ritual handbook exists. The brahmins appointed had to purify themselves as usual; they worshipped at the altar installed along with the ‘bed-gift’ and were then supposed to cook their meal themselves, although they were helped. After the formal consigning of the *śayyādāna*, they received *ṭikā* from the *mūlapurohita* before going to take the meal.²⁷ The list of gifts given to the brahmin together with *śayyādāna* were, according to the priests present, suggested by them and finalized by the palace.

According to the *mūlapurohita* the whole corpus of death rituals for the perished royals was done according to a current *antyapaddhati* printed in Varanasi. For the 13-day *śuddhaśānti* rituals including *gṛhyaśāntihoma*, *rudrābhiṣeka* and *durmānaśānti*, additional handbooks were consulted.

All the *paddhatis* available in local bookstalls do mention *śayyādāna* as part of the eleventh-day rituals, but none mentions the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*. The rituals for the eleventh day generally include *snāna* for the *kriyāputra*, his dressing in white and the purification of the room where he had stayed for the first ten days as well as of the place where the gift offerings will be placed. The offerings of *madyaṣoḍaśapiṇḍa* (‘[offering of] the middle set of sixteen rice balls’) and *śayyādāna* together with *kāñcapuruṣadāna* (‘gift of a golden image’ of the dead), *dvijadampatipūjana* (‘worship of a brahmin and his wife’) and *vṛṣotsarga* with *rudrahoma* (release of a calf after branding it and fire-offering to Rudra as main deity) are described for the same day. Further ritual elements consisting of special treatments of brahmins, *brāhmaṇapūjā*, the ‘worship of a brahmin’, and *brāhmaṇa-bhojana*, the ‘feast of brahmins’, the latter recommended as a part of the 13th-day concluding rituals, do not reflect any relation with the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*.

One must conclude that upon a king’s death exactly the same rituals are performed as for any other mortal of the same *varṇa*. Being a king implies being born into the *kṣatriya-varṇa*. The death rituals performed are in accordance with

²⁶ See Turner 1966.

²⁷ Every ritual gift (*dāna*) is introduced by a *dāna-saṅkalpa*, a formula uttered by the offerer mentioning exact time and place, the name/provenance of the offerer, the name of the receiver, the ritual context and merits expected). This part was not shown to the public and I rely on information provided by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita.

those prescribed for this second-highest among the four *varṇas* of Hindu society. A king's *pretātman* is believed to suffer according to the *karma* accumulated during his life in the same way as any mortal. As will be shown, even the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* is not an affair exclusively practised for kings.

Historical facts and contexts relating to the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* in Nepal

Some local newspapers reporting on the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* traced this ritual tradition back to the entry of the Śāha rulers into the Valley (AD 1768) while others declared it to have been practised since time immemorial. Usually it is said to be performed exclusively for kings, though one can come across the opinion that it has been practised for high-ranking army officers (including colonels) of the Rāṇā dynasty as well.²⁸ From the *Gorkhāpatra*, the oldest daily newspaper in Nepal, one can glean some details on the death rituals performed for the late kings Mahendra and Tribhuvan.²⁹ For Mahendra, who died in February 1972, the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* was performed by Śrī Gaṇeśa Bhaṭṭa, a brahmin from Bāneśvar, one of the eastern quarters of Kathmandu. The report on the eleventh-day rituals further mentions that the *kāṭṭe* was scheduled to stay for three days in the *kāṭṭe-pāṭī* in Jawalakhel before leaving the Valley.³⁰

King Tribhuvan died in Zurich, Switzerland, and his body reached Nepal only five days later, after a stopover in Delhi, where he was paid official veneration. The report on the eleventh-day rituals briefly states that the *kāṭṭograhaṇa* was performed according to tradition, the brahmin selected being a Bhaṭṭa from India who resided in the Naradevī section of Kathmandu. Further mentioned are some of the gifts (an elephant, a horse, and about one *lākh* rupees in valuables from the *śayyādāna*) and the presence of high officials at the function.³¹

A very valuable historical document offers proof of the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* performed for Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha, the first of the Śāha kings in the Valley. An official letter dated V.S. 1831 (AD 1774-5), it contains an apology to the son of Lakṣyomana Khanāla, the '*mahābrāhmaṇa*' who had taken the *kāṭṭo*, after locals disgraced him continuously as a '*kāṭṭya*'.³² One can assume that Lakṣyomana

²⁸ This was confirmed to me by some local elders, who said that it was common practice for Rāṇā ministers.

²⁹ File copies of the *Gorkhāpatra* are available at the National Archives in Kathmandu.

³⁰ The *Gorkhāpatra* on 11 February 1972 reports but factually on the deceased Majesty the King Mahendra's eleventh day rituals at the local Kālamocana ghāṭ and the steps to follow, with a repeated stress on these practices being in accordance with the Vedic ritual prescriptions and with ancient tradition respectively.

³¹ See *Gorkhāpatra*, 28 March 1955. Naradevī ṭol in Kathmandu has a large number of Bhaṭṭas who settled there after coming to Nepal.

³² Quoting from Pūrṇimā, year 7, part 1, 61-62 (note that it was common practice to write the letter ṣ both for *kh* and the retroflex sibilant): *āge bhaimālyā lakṣyomana ṣanāla kana ihā yekādaśāko māhābrāhmaṇa tulyāñuṃ/ tassarthaḥ inkā chorākana jhārā beṭi udhāvanī padhāvanī māpha garibaksaum/ bākinko basyāko ghaḍyāri ropanī 9 tasako potāsameta*

Khanāla himself was no longer around at the time of the release of the document, either because he had died or was out of reach, but the document does not provide clear evidence of expulsion from the Valley. The fact that Lakṣyomana Khanāla appears as the brahmin chosen for the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo* of Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha disproves a widely held opinion that Bhaṭṭa brahmins from India have always been selected as *mahābrāhmaṇas* for Nepal's Śāha kings. Comparing the names recorded in the past, one can only presume a tendency to choose from among the highest-ranking Upādhyāya brahmins for this duty, be they Bhaṭṭas (as confirmed for Tribhuvan and Mahendra) or Pūrvīyās (Sapkoṭā, Ācārya, Khanāla). Since the Śāha rulers, the family priests appointed by the palace are Upādhyāya brahmins of the *Kumāi* section (Pāṇḍe, Panta). It is therefore of no surprise that representatives of this branch are not among the *kāṭṭe* brahmins. According to both the *mūla*- and *rājapurohita* presently officiating, the brahmins are selected by palace officials, but are required to give their consent. Indeed, the brahmin first chosen for Dipendra's *kāṭṭo* refused at the last moment, over the gifts offered in turn.

Brahmins from India may have gone back to their country of origin but, according to the *mūlapurohita* (who added that the current Nepal constitution prohibits the exile of a Nepali citizen) they were only required to leave the Valley, in a southerly or westerly direction, along the roads to Chapagaun/Lele or Thankot respectively. This is confirmed by the fact that the brahmins summoned for King Mahendra and King Tribhuvan were provided with houses and land in the Nepal Tarai.

A report written in V.S. 1894 (AD 1838) states that Śrīkrṣṇa Upādhyāya died two years after eating the *kāṭṭo* for King Siddhi Pratāpa Śāha of Gulmī (a minor independent kingdom at the time, which merged into united Nepal in V.S. 1843).³³

This proves that the *kāṭṭo* was not only practised at the Śāha royal palace in Kathmandu, but also outside the Valley.

No explicit document has yet been found on the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* for Malla kings. Given the fact that the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo* meal appears to have been widespread among some Newar upper-status communities, one may assume it to have been practised in a similar way for the Malla kings as well. A treatise on the caste system in Nepal ordered by Jayasthiti Malla (14th century) and quoted in the Hodgson

māpha garibaksyau/ santānaikana māpha bhayo/ bāmki inkā chorākana kāṭyā bhanī helā gari kasaile bhanyā taskana sāsti garaumlāḥ/

“The deceased Lakṣyomana Khanāla, as he consumed that very eleventh day meal, turned into a Mahābrāhmaṇa. Therefore his son will be given grass land as a compensation, and we apologize. (By providing) nine ropanī land together with the buildings remaining from the previous settlers and including the land tax we apologize. In this way the descendants are compensated. Whoever calls his only remaining son a ‘kāṭyā’ or otherwise disgraces him, will be punished from now on.” Dinesh Raj Pant kindly provided me with this reference.

³³ See Śaṅkarmāna Rājavamśī: *Purātattva-patrasaṃgraha*, part 2. Kathmandu: Śrī 5 ko sarkāra purātattva ra saṃskṛti vibhāga, V.S. 2018 (AD 1960) (*Purātattvaparakāśanmālā*; 7), page 107. Dinesh Raj Pant kindly provided me with this reference.

manuscripts names the 'Bha/Mahabrāhman' as dyers of wool and cotton with red colour, and further notes that they "take the death gifts on the eleventh day and eat a bit of the corpse" (Chattopadhyay 1980: 116). In his description of the funeral ceremonies of Newar Kṣatriyas, Hodgson again associated the 'Bhā/Bhāt' with the eating of a piece of the brain of the dead, extracted before cremation (Chattopadhyay 1980: 84, 96).

Gopal Singh Nepali states that "a similar practice exists among the present Gorkha royal family of Nepal", but is otherwise not common among the Newars among whom he inquired (Nepali 1965: 140). As mentioned by Levy and Rājopādhyāya, Pradhan, and Toffin – referring to Newar communities in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Panauti respectively – following deaths in the upper *thars* (subcastes) of the Newar Śivamārgi, the Bhā/Kārañjit, said to be fallen brahmins, used to be appointed to eat the contemptible meal. According to Levy & Rājopādhyāya (1992: 359-361, 683, 769 n.80) a Bhā assisted the *kriyāputra* in carrying out the ritual obligations of the first ten days, and on the final day was dismissed with a considerable number of gifts after consuming a meal mixed with some part of the deceased's brain. As the authors add, in recent times the boiled rice to be served to the Bhā on the eleventh day is at most simply touched with a bone fragment of the deceased.

In his thesis on Newar Hindu rituals in Kathmandu, Rajendra Pradhan states that the funeral priest (Bhā) is at times identified with the *preta* and he "absorbs the sins of the dead person when he eats a small portion of his skull on the eleventh morning" (Pradhan 1986: 218, 225).

As for Panauti Newars, the traditional *kāṭṭo* meal consists of *cyūra* (beaten rice), honey, clarified butter, and sesame. It is mixed with a part of the skull-bone and served to a member of the Bhā community. One makes sure that the Bhā on his way back home does not look back a single time (Toffin 1987: 222-223). Toffin mentions that this practice is common among non-Newar Kṣatriyas as well, especially Rāṇās and Śāhas.³⁴

According to Newar Rājopādhyāya priests, there is a concept of a threefold succession of *śayyādāna* and meals served during the first thirteen days after death: (a) *Rudra-śayyā/Rudra(Śiva)-bhojana* on the first or seventh day (to a Jugi), (b) *Brahmā-śayyā/Brahmā-bhojana* on the eleventh day (to a Bhā) and (c) *Viṣṇu-śayyā/Viṣṇu-bhojana* on the thirteenth day (to the domestic priest).³⁵ 'Kaṭya'

³⁴ Toffin (1979: 250 n.14); Toffin relied on personal communications for this statement.

³⁵ On a more abstract level, these three steps and the respective deities addressed are correlated with the three *guṇas* (*sattva, rajas, tamas*), the basic qualities characterising the human organism (personal communication by Ratna Rāja Rājopādhyāya, Bhaktapur). Such an understanding may not be shared by all, though the reduction of very complex matters to some core principles like the male-female opposition, the three *guṇas* or the five gross elements (fire, water, earth, wind, ether) is quite common among learned Newars.

(New.) is applied to the eleventh-day bhojana only.³⁶ The relation of Brahmā, the creator god within the trinity, to the *kāṭṭo* meal remains to be explained, though.

As the above mentioned records show, within Newar tradition the duty of *mahābrāhmaṇa* is conferred only on members of the low-ranking Bhā community. Kāpālī (Kusle/Jugi/Jogi) may accept food on the seventh day for the benefit of the deceased, but this is not equated with the *kāṭṭo* meal.³⁷ Both Bhā and Jugi thars being an integral part of the community, there was no question of sending them off, but they were given the lowest social ranking, none the less. The tradition of serving the *kāṭṭo* meal to a member of a specific *thar* is disappearing among the Newar communities, and the adding of some remains of the dead body has been completely abandoned, according to all informants questioned.³⁸ As an alternative, the discharge of the meal into a nearby river has become common practice instead. The conviction is still current that on the tenth or eleventh day no outsider, be he a brahmin or anyone else, may accept anything from the mourning household for fear of extreme pollution and trouble caused by the *preta* of the deceased.

Inquiries into local traditions show that *kāṭṭo* was not exclusive to kings but practised within specific local communities as well, albeit with significant variation. With these records taken into account, the distinguishing features of the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* as performed for Nepal's kings are the high-ranking brahmin chosen, his consuming a single *kāṭṭo* meal, and his then being sent off on an elephant loaded down with gifts beyond the means of commoners to afford. Several elements add up to the brahmin becoming a most denigrated one, so much so that any contact with him, even by sight, is to be avoided. Deprived of both his previous ritual and social status, he is addressed as '*kāṭṭe*' for the rest of his life.

The perils of transition

What is it about the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* that provokes such a devastating effect on the consumer's status and reputation? Generally the state of impurity (Nep. *āśauco*, *biṭulo*) attached to house and family members of the deceased keeps outsiders from entering the house, and more especially from accepting any food or water from that household. This rule is followed up to the conclusion of the thirteen-day *āśauca*

³⁶ In Newār the eleventh-day feeding of the impure meal is called *kāṭya nakegu/kāṭo nakyagu* – 'to feed the impure meal' or *cipa tikegu* – 'to become polluted by tasting'.

³⁷ See, for example, Ishii (1995: 116-117). The Kāpālī/Jugi – formerly Śaivite ascetics, but nowadays householders – are not only on that occasion, but constantly conceived as the specialists most able to deal with matters relating to death and the dead. This capacity is explained by the Kāpālīs' proximity to Śiva, the deity most closely associated with actual death, cremation grounds and ghostly hords. He is regularly venerated as Mr̥tyuñjaya, 'the one who has attained victory over death'. On the Kāpālīs' relation to death see Bouillier (1993).

³⁸ A very practical reason is that few families of the traditionally appointed thars are left, and their members increasingly refuse to accept such despised tasks.

period.³⁹ The eleventh day is considered as the most ‘dangerous’ in this respect. In some families, even the mourning members of the household completely abstain from taking food during this day. This is explained in terms of the concepts underlying the *antyeṣṭi* rituals. During the previous days the *pretātman* (said to be the size of a thumb, or one *aṅgula*), which consists mainly of the wind and fire elements, has little by little been given a new subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*), created by the *piṇḍas* offered daily. On the tenth day the *pretarūpa* starts experiencing *bhoga*. Consequently the eleventh-day rituals mainly focus on satisfying the bodily and material desires of the *pretātman*. Related to this is the strong wish to have it abandon its ties to relatives and surroundings and leave for its journey towards *pitṛloka*, the realm of the ancestors.

As to the Darbar practice, another reason for the meal becoming *kāṭṭo* lies in the fact that a brahmin, normally a strict vegetarian, is forced to eat meat, a he-goat having been slaughtered for this purpose the same morning. The brahmin, once transformed into a living substitute for the late king, receives all the materials to satisfy the king’s *pretātman*’s *bhoga*, and therefore is to eat meat – meat being part of the daily diet of a Kṣatriya.⁴⁰ The brahmin is conceived as a *mahāpātra* (‘great vessel’), in that he channels food and offerings to the king in his transitional form. He is even said to become the *pretātman* itself.⁴¹

Finally, the dishes used to be topped by a piece of the frontal bone of the departed king’s skull, worked into a paste. The sprinkling of any such substance on the *kāṭṭo* meal served in the name of the late kings Birendra and Dipendra has been denied by both the *mūla-* and *rājapurohitas* consulted. They confirmed that this was practised in bygone days, however. As for textual sources, they referred to the Dharmasindhu (DhSi) and Nirṇayasindhu (NiSi).

These compilations based on medieval *śāstras* and *smṛtis* do include *śayyādāna* as a specific ritual gift to be offered to a brahmin on the concluding day of the *karmakriyā* period, usually the eleventh day after death. The DhSi states, referring to the *Padmapurāṇa*, that a piece of the frontal bone is to be ground and mixed with rice cooked in milk (*pāyasa*). This dish is then to be served to a brahmin and his wife.⁴² The same text thereafter states that such has not been practised in ‘Mahārāṣṭradeśa’ (Central India) in recent times.⁴³ As ‘fruit’ of such an offering of

³⁹ For the chief mourner and all the children of the deceased a less rigid *āśauca* period is kept up to one year. Males dress in white and abstain from consuming milk if their mother died, while in the case of their father’s death they avoid yoghurt. No auspicious ritual is performed or attended, and no compulsory one occurs in the house of the main mourner.

⁴⁰ Such was the argument of the *mūlapurohita*. According to the Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra, the feast served to brahmins on the eleventh day has to contain meat dishes (Pandey 1969: 265).

⁴¹ Personal communication by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita. Compare Parry (1980: 108 n.7).

⁴² I consulted the Dharmasindhu edited by Śrīkrṣṇadāsa Khemarāja and published in Bombay by Śrīveṅkaṭeśvara Press in 1974 (V.S. 2041); section on *śayyādāna*, page 748.

⁴³ The text was published from Mumbai (Bombay), and one is to understand that the compilers were not in favour of such a practice.

the ‘bed-gift’, the deceased’s *preta* is expected to abide happily in heaven, Indraloka (*Puraṇḍarapura*) or the realm of the *Lokapālas*. The NiSi⁴⁴ quotes the same *purāṇa*, albeit with alternative details. With the completion of death on the second day already, a bed should be offered together with auspicious objects, including a golden image of the deceased, fruits and cloth, and after worshipping a brahmin and his wife seated on the bed, one offers them a mixture of milk and honey. The text continues with the statement that among *pārvatīyas* – a designation which refers to the communities of the Himalayan regions – there is the practice of serving a part of the skull-bone taken from the ‘forehead’ (*lālāṭika*) mixed with yoghurt and milk in a silver bowl, but it does not make clear the occasion. The passage ends by repeating that this knowledge is found among *pārvatīya* brahmins only. Although rich on elaborations of prescriptions concerning forms and combinations of *brāhmaṇa-bhojana* (‘feast for brahmins’) and bed-gifts relating to death, both the DhSi and NiSi refer exclusively to the Padmapurāṇa as a source on the practice of mixing a part of the skull-bone into a meal served to a brahmin couple. Both texts make clear that this is a practice not generally followed, denying that it occurs, for instance, in Central India (DhSi) or explicitly ascribing it to ritual traditions of the Himalayas (NiSi). Present-day *antya-paddhatis* still include the *dvijadampatipūjā*, the (symbolic) worship of a brahmin couple, on the eleventh day, with the couple explicitly stated to be worshipped while sitting on the bed.⁴⁵ But the relation of this to the *kāṭṭo* meal seems completely lost.

Ritual processing of bodily materials

A survey of the whole of the ritual practices related to death reveals that not only the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* but other postmortuary rituals as well included – or continue to include – remains of the gross body, the major components being the bones and the ashes they are reduced to during cremation. These ritual elements will now be reviewed in order to identify clues to underlying concepts.

The whole corpus of rituals for the dead aims at preventing the dead turning into one of a variety of ‘tormented, malevolent spirits’ (Nep. *bhūtpret*) who may return to torment the living. The fear of trouble caused by unreleased ‘souls’, be they called *pretas*, *bhūtas*, *masans*, *piśācas* or otherwise, is omnipresent. Consequently, precautions are taken in the ritual sphere. During every fire sacrifice performed, they are given their share of offerings, outside the ritual area, in order to stop them

⁴⁴ I consulted the Nirṇayasindhu edited by Śrīkamalākara Bhaṭṭa and published in Varanasi by Thakurprasāda eṇḍ sans bukselar in 1970 (V.S. 2027). The following passages are part of the *trītyapariccheda/uttarārdha/āśaucādīprakaraṇa*, sub-chapter ‘*ekādaśāhakṛtya-nirūpaṇam*’, pages 1224-36.

⁴⁵ Inquired on this matter, the acting priests commented that the brahmin couple serves as a symbol of ongoing re-creation.

interfering.⁴⁶ With postmortuary rituals several similar acts can be observed. On the way to the cremation ground, grain offerings may be thrown at crossroads for roaming spirits to feed on. Another practice of similar motivation consists in cutting off a fleshy part of the dead body before cremation and burying it some distance away in order to feed and keep away *masans*, a specific category of ghosts that roams around cremation *ghāṭs*, feeding on human flesh.⁴⁷ According to the officiating *rājapurohitas*, such a practice was not part of the cremation of the recently deceased kings. However, on the last pages of her book *With a King in the Clouds* (London 1959), Erika Leuchttag mentions it in her description of King Tribhuvan's cremation. According to her a piece of flesh was cut from the area around the navel and then, together with some gold coins, buried on an island in the Bagmati River.⁴⁸

Asthisañcayana, the 'assembling of the bones', used to be performed on the 4th or 5th day, the remains of the funeral pyre being untouched until then.⁴⁹ Nowadays the remaining bones and ashes are usually committed to the river with the extinction of the fire. The *asthisañcayana* may be merely symbolic, as in the case of the royals, with no real bones involved. However, *antyakarmapaddhatis* may prescribe the collection and purification of bones and ashes from the funeral pyre, which are then placed in an earthen pot to be buried in the jungle or at the riverside. Within the first ten days this pot is collected and brought to a *tīrtha* for immersion.⁵⁰ In a former Newar version of the practice, before immersion the bones were collected and arranged in their bodily order, the missing eyes and teeth being replaced with *hatā* (New.) and *kaudā* (small varieties of conch). This arrangement was then worshipped by invoking Viṣṇu and finally immersed in the river.⁵¹ A similar ritual is described by Nepali (1965: 133).

For the *asthipravāha*, the ritual immersion of a piece of bone at a *śrāddhatīrtha* within ten days after death, a piece of the king's skull was placed in a silver box, and the latter wrapped in cloth. One of the *rājapurohitas* was brought to

⁴⁶ The *mahābali* ('great offering/sacrifice') is part of the concluding steps of a fire sacrifice and consists of an offering of food and worship items to the *bhūtpret*. Arranged in leaf plates those items are usually placed at nearby crossroads.

⁴⁷ According to Madhan Bhaṭṭa this practice can still be observed at the Paśupati ghāṭs, albeit rarely (personal communication). Compare Stone (1988: 108-109) on the feeding of such ghosts.

⁴⁸ The passage in the German translation of Leuchttag's book: "Ein Brahmine schnitt ihm aus der Nabelgegend ein Stück Fleisch, etwa in der Grösse einer Taube. Mit Goldmünzen beschwert wurde dies auf einer kleinen Insel mitten im Bhagmati beerdigt und die darüber angezündeten Wachsstöcke warfen unter dem Atem der schweigend Zuschauenden zitternde Reflexe" (Leuchttag 1959: 255).

⁴⁹ For an overview of *asthisañcayana* practices according to a variety of authoritative texts see Kane (1973: 240-244).

⁵⁰ Such is the summary of the ritual as described in the *Antyakarmapaddhati* published by the Mahendra Sanskrit University, V.S. 2056 (AD 1999-2000), 49-51. As a comparison with other Pārbate *vidhis* shows, the *asthisañcayana* is a ritual lacking a uniform practice.

⁵¹ Personal communication, Guruśekhara Rājopadhyāya.

the Kālīgaṇḍakī *tīrtha* by an army helicopter to discharge this duty. This *tīrtha* is famous for its *śālagrāma* stones.⁵² It is believed that by immersing the bones there the preta of the deceased will merge into the body of Viṣṇu.⁵³ Raj Bali Pandey quotes a passage from Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra (iii, 10) stating that if one's bones are floated in the Ganges River a dwelling in Brahmaloḥa is secured for thousands of *yugas* (Pandey 1969, 261).

Newars may choose to perform the *asthipravāha* at five *tīrthas* within the Kathmandu Valley – all of them confluences of rivers. These generally include Hanumān-ghāṭ in Bhaktapur, Trivenī-ghāṭ in Panauti, Gokaṛṇa-*tīrtha*, Saṅkamūla-ghāṭ in Patan and Pachali-Bhairav-ghāṭ in Teku (Kathmandu).⁵⁴ According to Gopal Singh Nepali, it was common for Newars to perform the *asthipravāha* at those five different *tīrthas* with the scalp, the two shoulder joints and the two kneecaps (Nepali 1965: 133).

A similar conception motivates the scattering of ashes into the water of some holy river, preferably a *śrāddhatīrtha*. Running waters not only stand for effective means of ritual purification, but also for a cyclic energy flow between the earth and the divine heavens, and therefore for a means to ascend the divine realms. Though this was not practised for the late kings, some local communities, Newar as well as Pārbate, will collect ashes from the funeral pyre and later sprinkle them into the flowing waters at one of the *śrāddhatīrthas* in India (Gaya, Prayag, Haridvar or Benares) or in Nepal.⁵⁵

Seen in such contexts, the ritual processing of bodily materials is anything but unique to the *kāṭṭo* meal. Except for the offering of a sacrificial share to the *bhūtpret*, those ritual instances follow a similar pattern. A remnant of the bodily substance of the deceased is collected after cremation and then ritually processed in order to support the *pretātman* in attaining the otherworldly destination wished for him. The medium chosen is a river, ideally a confluence of rivers emptying into the Ganges. Flowing waters are not only conceived as the most powerful means of ritual purification but also as 'bridges' to the realms of the gods.

Still, some unique features remain in the case of the 'traditional' *kāṭṭo* meal. It involves a clearly defined part of the body and is to be consumed by a brahmin. Similarly, in his valuable paper on death rituals and inherent food symbolism, Jonathan Parry parallels the cremation fire with the *mahābrāhmaṇa*'s digestive fire (*jaṭharāgni*), in that both are means of forwarding offerings to a final recipient (Parry 1985: 614, 625). Taking this line of thought further, this would lead to an interpretation of the dead body being offered for a second time, along with the

⁵² *Śālagrāmas* are petrified conches in black stone (quartzose). They are conceived as one of the material representations of Viṣṇu.

⁵³ Personal communication, Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita, who was entrusted to perform the *asthipravāha* for both kings.

⁵⁴ Personal communication, Ratna Rāja Rājopādhyāya. See also Toffin (1979: 246).

⁵⁵ Personal communications.

eleventh-day meal. But such an interpretation runs aground. If cremation is conceived as a fire sacrifice with one's own body offered to the flames, another, symbolic offering of the very same body would stretch the brahmin's digestive capacity beyond its limits. The piece of bone chosen is collected only after completion of the *dāhasaṃskāra*, the skull being one of the parts not wholly consumed by the fire. Any fire sacrifice has its 'remnants'. Whether actually transformed by the consuming flames or not, they are ritually empowered and therefore endowed with specific qualities. They may be used during the concluding part of the sacrifice – be it as offerings to the *bhūtpret*, *prasāda*, *ṭikā* or as part of the *dāna* or *dakṣiṇā* to the officiating brahmins – or else discharged into a river, but in no instance are they offered again or left to an outsider. The same holds for the leftovers from the cremation pyre.

The piece of bone taken from the central part of the front of the skull itself hints at a different interpretation. *Lālāṭī* refers to the divine 'third eye', the point where Agni or Śiva is located. It is the location of one of the *cakras* and the point where a *tilaka* is placed upon completion of a fire sacrifice.⁵⁶ The term *lālāṭikā*, as it appears in the above quotations from the DhSi and NiSi, is used in the Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra in the sense of 'related to fate or destiny' – supposed to be written on the forehead. Still today it is said that the destiny of a baby can be read on its forehead during the first days after birth. This part of the human body is associated with focused divine energy, even with divinity itself. There, ritual merits are made visible, which increase with every *tilaka* applied. Adding the *lālāṭikā* bone to the meal served on the eleventh day to a *mahābrāhmaṇa* would thus again help to create a 'bridge' between the human and divine worlds, along the path the *pretātman* is wished to take.

The use of parts of the body or material substances closely related to a specific individual reminds one of practices common in the context of divination, healing or sympathetic magic. Seen from this angle, the most precious part of the deceased's previous gross body may be thought to assure the identification of the brahmin with the preta by providing material contact. A similar explanation may account for the offering of a golden image of the deceased together with the eleventh-day *śayyādāna*. *Abhicāra*,⁵⁷ a system of magical practices to affect and transform – whether to heal or harm – is mainly based on material manipulations, empowered language, and specific body-and-mind practices. The basic concepts underlying *abhicāra* – often translated as 'Hindu magic' – are in no way exclusive to a set category like 'magic', rather they appear to be, to some degree at least, an integral part of any ritual. The mantras used in ritual are believed to work in the same fashion, by representing, effecting, attaching, transferring. However, the purposes and merits sought will differ. The *abhicāra* specialist may use people's hair or nails

⁵⁶ This kind of *tilaka* is prepared from ashes and remains of the *ghyū* ('clarified butter') used for the fire oblations. It is applied to four places on the body – to the forehead (*lalāṭe*), throat, right shoulder and heart.

⁵⁷ On *abhicāra* see Türistig (1985) and Kane (1977, vol 5.2: 721).

to manipulate, trace, or work his intended effect on them. On the other hand, the priest directs his efforts towards bringing the human into contact with the divine.

With such contexts in mind, the bodily substances taken from the funeral pyre and included in further rituals reveal a common intent. They are understood as additional means to ensure that the deceased person is sent in the appropriate direction, toward the realms of ancestors and gods. The primary medium is the sacrificial fire; additional ones are *mahābrāhmaṇas* and rivers or *tīrthas*. And as a recent tendency, flowing water as a purifier and mediator between human and divine realms takes over some of the deprecated functions traditionally is charged by human actors.

The context of the *śayyādāna* offering

The *dānakhaṇḍa* ('section on gift-offerings') in Hemādri's *Caturvargacintāmaṇi* covers nearly one thousand pages of printed text. Among the *puṇyādāna* (gift offered in the name of a deity to obtain spiritual merits) several occasions for *śayyādāna* are described. The eleventh-day 'bed-gift' to a brahmin is not among them.

In the case of Birendra and Dipendra, *śayyādāna* was one of the gifts offered on the eleventh day to the respective *mahābrāhmaṇas*. A second *śayyādāna* in the name of the two kings was given to the *mūlapurohita* as part of the thirteenth-day *śuddhaśānti* rituals at Nārāyaṇahiṭi palace (see Table 2). As *rājapurohita* Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita confirmed, all the ritual gifts offered to the preta are inauspicious, even dangerous for a human to accept. Therefore, with the exception of the eleventh-day *śayyādāna*, they were immersed into the Bagmati River. Only the gifts of the 12th and 13th day were accepted by the Darbar *mūlapurohita* and other brahmins involved.

In the DhSi and NiSi and in some of the *antypaddhatis* consulted, one finds this meaningful distinction between the two bed-gifts confirmed by a specific attribute. The eleventh-day *dāna* requires a golden image of the dead person (*kāñcanapurūṣadāna*)⁵⁸ while a golden image of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa is prescribed as part of the 13th-day *śayyādāna*. These images identify the final receiver of the gift – the *preta* and Viṣṇu-Lakṣmī respectively.

The distinction made above by the *rājapurohita* between gifts offered in the context of death conforms to the one made by Ayodhya Pandas between 'auspicious' or 'worth considering' (*puṇya*, *maṅgala*, *vicāraṇīya*) and inauspicious (*āmaṅgala*, *avicāraṇīya*) gifts (van der Veer 2001: 165). The latter include gifts to pretas or

⁵⁸ The ritual manuals consulted do include the gift of a *purūṣa* image in gold, stated to represent the *pretātman*. In the case of the kings, this image was replaced by a framed photograph.

inauspicious planets, or ones meant to ward off evil or get rid of sin or illness. This distinction is important with respect to the kind of brahmin who eventually accepts a *preta/prayaścitta-dāna* or *puṇyadāna* respectively.⁵⁹ Whereas low-ranking brahmins or service castes are called upon to accept the former, it is exclusively high-ranking brahmins who accept the latter. According to such a rule, a high-ranking brahmin will never accept food or other items designated for a *preta*, but he will take what is associated with the *pitaraḥ*, the forefathers.⁶⁰

The eleventh-day *kāṭṭo/śayyādāna* for a deceased king requires a high-status Upādhyāya brahmin to offer himself as a *mahāpātra* ('great vessel', 'sacrificial vessel').⁶¹ This represents a major exception, with far-reaching consequences for the brahmin accepting the eleventh-day meal and gifts.

Although Jonathan Parry assumes that *dāna* always implies the acceptance of the sins of the donor (1980, 103) one would rather argue in this case that the *kāṭṭe* brahmin takes upon himself the sins of the final receiver of the gift – the king's *pretātman* still bound by the *karma* of the deceased king. As stated by the *rājapurohita*, the *kāṭṭe* brahmin is not only conceived as a mediator for the food and gifts, but also as being ritually transformed into the *pretātman* itself. Such a conception is confirmed in the DhSi, in the requirement that such a brahmin go through all the *saṃskāra* rituals anew in order to become a human (*puruṣa*) again.⁶²

That such a measure was prescribed at least proves that the brahmin can do something about his reduced ritual status, though this may not help him to overcome the loss of social recognition.

⁵⁹ Both van der Veer (2001, 161) and Parry (1980: 102-105) discuss at length the duty of the brahmin to accept gifts – a duty which binds him to the giver's person and the motive behind the gift, and which is a basic source of inner conflict, contradicting as it does the brahmanical ideal of renunciation.

⁶⁰ Toffin analyses the various specialised castes involved in Newar funerary rituals (Toffin 1987). As for those derived from brahmin castes among them, he distinguishes three groups: the brahmin, the Karmācārya and the Bhā, Kusle etc. He observes that their affinity with particular categories of divine entities (Vedic-vegetarian deities/Tantric-carnivore deities/demonic-ghostly-malevolent beings) is reflected in the duties they fulfil within the complex of (post)mortuary rituals and the kinds of gifts involved (Toffin 1987: 231-232).

⁶¹ This epithet was used by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita in addition to '*mahābrāhmaṇa*'. As for the funeral specialists at the cremation *ghāṭṣ* of Benares, such a form of address is exclusively applied to the category of funeral priests who offer their services between the first and eleventh day of the postmortuary rituals (Parry, 91-92). In the same paper Parry mentions alternative appellations, such as '*preta-brāhmaṇa*' or '*katkaha*'. Though the latter term may correspond to Nep. '*kāṭṭe*', he suggests that it is derived from Hindi *katila* ('obstacle', 'trouble') and *katu* ('bad') (Parry 1980: 108 n7).

⁶² Quote from DhSi, end of the section on *śayyādāna*, p. 748: *pretaśayyāpratigrāhī na bhūyaḥ puruṣo bhavet// grhītāyāṃ tu tasyāṃ vai punaḥ saṃskāramarhati//*

Scapegoat in royal gear?

Such an understanding is confirmed by the interpretation of the death ceremonies of the hill *rājas* described in Hutchison (1982, App. VII); the appellation of the brahmin as a *pret palu* ('sustainer of the *preta*') confirms notions described above, the escorting of the brahmin across the border while preventing him from selling any of the gifts accumulated are explained as measures to counteract a lurking conflict of authority feared to arise if the former king and his belongings were not physically removed from the state. Adding to this, the precipitate measures undertaken in order to prevent the ruler's lion throne being left empty were motivated by similar ends. The hasty declaration of the crown prince as the new king, while he was in hospital and soon to succumb to his injuries, then Gyanendra's ritual enthronement (*siṃhāsanārohana*) enacted at Hanumandhoka within one hour after the official declaration of Dipendra's death, occurred even through critics disapproved of such hasty action at a time of utmost confusion – it was even purposed to set up an image of Viṣṇu until the circumstances had been clarified. These instances substantiate the conviction that the death of a king initiates not only a critical period from the point of view of his transformation into an ancestor, but also of a possible instability and crisis for the kingdom. Comparing the elaborate series of rituals performed for a king's enthronement and coronation to the ritual addressing his demise as a ruler, one concludes that the only distinctive ritual act is the chasing away of the disguised brahmin as a means of filling the gap, whereas the rest of the postmortuary rituals are conducted according to his status as a human being, albeit with a funeral procession enlivened by the presence of officials, an army band, saluting army formations, and rounds of artillery in his honour. Compared with the ritual embedding of the enthronement, the pragmatic final part of the royal *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*, accompanied by governmental security personnel rather than the palace priests, can be understood as an expression of the desire for the monarchy to prosper unhindered.

Concluding remarks

The 2001 *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* attracted extraordinary attention among the Nepali people. As it was telecast live by the state-owned TV channel, many people saw and subsequently discussed it. Things did not play out in the expected manner, and this caught the eye of journalists and the general public. The brahmins were sent home instead of being made to leave the Valley, leading people to suspect that a shady agreement had been entered into between officials and the brahmins.⁶³ Indeed,

⁶³ The brahmins especially insisted on receiving a house and land, even as such items had been provided for previous *kāṭṭe* brahmins. In addition, they felt cheated at being forced to sell some of the gifts for a nominal price far below the market value.

several kinds of expectations were dashed. The *mūlapurohita* publicly disclaimed having added anything from the funeral pyre to the dishes served. With the elephants already on their way back to Chitwan National Park and the brahmins still at the Jawalakhel *kāṭṭe pāṭī*, their cry of having been cheated by the government became a public affair. Commenting on the thousands of onlookers coming to Patan, requiring a protective ring of police, the brahmins were compared to the animals housed in the nearby zoo by some journalists. With debates starting over the brahmins' greed, there was hardly scrap of dignity left. Subsequently the whole ritual was proclaimed a fossil from times long gone, and the enactment of it was regretted as having added to the reputation of the country as backward. Raghu Pant, a reporter of the *Kantipur* daily, even petitioned the government to have the personal belongings of the kings taken back from the brahmins before the latter sold them off to private collectors, or even tourists. There was no serious attempt to rectify the performance of the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* within its obviously re-adapted ritual framework. The absence of some of its core aspects would have justified doing so.

The eleventh-day *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* is a striking example of a ritual caught between tradition and the rational tendencies and practical requirements of modern life. Its performance was not only affected by a limited budget; altered sensibilities deprived it of some of the main elements formerly contributing to its uniqueness. The practice of sprinkling the meal with a paste made from the deceased's skull, having become devoid of meaning, fell prey to a growing feeling of distaste, if not aversion, for all such 'superstition' of former times. The force with which the acting priests denied having cut anything from the dead bodies or added any remains of the kings' funeral pyre to the eleventh-day meal was in line with a general trend to expurgate ritual practice. The brahmins appointed for the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*, who would have formerly been made outcastes and sent out of the Valley, had not only to resign themselves to a reduced number of gifts, but also to reintegrate themselves into their previous neighbourhood and community. Their fate was described in terms of social injustice or the consequences of greed, depending on the person asked. Nobody seemed to be any longer interested in the quiddity of the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* as an integral and meaningful element of *kriyākarma* rituals, and few would be likely to add their voice to it being continued in future. It has proven incompatible with a society struggling between traditional values and the trappings of modern life, whether they be urban development, a recent democratic constitution or a variety of alternative world-views to choose from.

Table 1: Timetable of events

Date	Place	Events-Rituals	Remarks
Fr 1.6.	Nārāyaṇahiṭī Royal Palace	Massacre	
Sa 2.6.	From Chauni hospital to Paśupati/ Ārya-ghāṭ	<i>Śraddāñjali</i> by officials, relatives and friends offering flowers <i>Śavayātr</i> to Ārya-ghāṭ, <i>dāhasaṃskāra</i> (cremation)	King Birendra, Queen Aishvarya, Prince Nirajan, Princess Shruti
Sa 2.6.		Dipendra declared new king, Gyanendra declared interim regent by the Rāja Paśād	
Su 3.6. to Su, 10.6.	Kālamocana-ghāṭ	<i>kriyākarma</i> , performed under supervision of the <i>mūlapurohita</i> , executed for the king and queen by a relative, for Nirajan by a priest appointed from the army	King Birendra, Queen Aishvarya, Prince Nirajan; (<i>kriyākarma</i> for Princess Shruti performed by her husband's family and priests)
Mo 4.6.		King Dipendra's and Dhirendra's death announced; Gyanendra ascends lion throne at Hanumāndhoka	
Mo 4.6.	From Chauni hospital to ārya-ghāṭ	<i>Śavayātrā</i> for Dipendra and Dhirendra	
Tu 5.6. to We, 13.6.	Kālamocana-ghāṭ	<i>Karmakriyā</i>	For Dipendra and Dhirendra
Mo 11.6.	Kālamocana-ghāṭ	<i>Śayyādāna</i> for King Birendra, Queen Aishvarya, prince Nirajan; <i>kāṭṭo</i> for King Birendra; <i>dāna/dakṣiṇā</i> for <i>dāgbattī dine</i> Brahmins	
Th 14.6.	Kālamocana-ghāṭ	<i>Śayyādāna/kāṭṭo</i> for King Dipendra; <i>śayyādāna</i> for Dhirendra	

Fr 15.6.	Nārāyaṇahiṭi	Last day for written condolences in the palace <i>śok-pustikā</i> ('mourning-book')	
Sa 16.6.	Nārāyaṇahiṭi	<i>Śuddhaśānti</i>	For King, Queen, Dipendra and Nirajan. (for Dhirendra at Kālamocana-ghāt)
Su 17.6.		<i>Kāṭṭe</i> brahmins brought back home	

Table 2: *Antyakarma* rituals performed and *dāna* offered

Day	Ritual	A Actor/R Receiver (real or symbolic)	Remarks
1	<i>śavayātrā dāhasaṃskāra</i> (<i>dehānta</i>)		1st-6th <i>piṇḍas</i> of <i>malinaṃ ṣoḍaśam</i> offered at once beside the <i>citā</i>
2-10	<i>karmakriyā</i> (Nep. <i>kiriya</i>)	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretātman</i>	7th-16th <i>piṇḍas</i> of <i>malinaṃ ṣoḍaśam</i>
2-10	<i>dīpadāna</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretātman</i>	at <i>Kālamocana-ghāt</i> (usually done at the deceased's house)
5	<i>pātheyaśrāddha</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretātman</i>	immersion into the Bagmati River
5	<i>asthisañcayana</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> / <i>rājapurohita</i>	'assembling of the bones' (done symbolically)
5	<i>asthipravāha</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	immersion of a piece of the skull at a <i>tīrtha</i> of the Kāli-gaṇḍakī River
5-9	Reciting from <i>Garuḍapurāṇa</i> (<i>uttarakhaṇḍa</i> / <i>pretakalpa</i>)	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	
11	<i>vṛṣotsarga</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> / <i>rājapurohita</i> , R <i>preta</i>	one he- and one she-calf branded and released

11	<i>udakumbhadāna</i> (<i>udakadāna</i>)	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretatva</i>	gift of small earthen pots with pieces of wood to clean the mouth (one for each day of the <i>pretatva</i> 's travel to <i>yamaloka</i>)
11	<i>kāñcanapurusaḍāna</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>mahābrāhmaṇa</i>	'gift of a golden image' of the dead
11	<i>dvijadampatipūjā</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i>	(symbolic) worship of a brahmin couple (done with <i>kuśa</i>)
11	<i>śayyādāna</i> and <i>kāṭṭo-grahaṇa</i>	R <i>mahābrāhmaṇa</i> (<i>preta</i>)	
12	<i>sapiṇḍīkaraṇa</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>preta</i>	<i>piṇḍas</i> emerged in river
12	<i>uttama-pātheyaśrāddha</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>mūlapurohita</i> (<i>pretatva</i>)	
13	<i>śuddha-śānti</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	
13	<i>śuddha-(gṛhya)-śānti-havana</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	Fire-offering for purification of the palace and its inhabitants
13	<i>rudrābhiṣeka</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	
13	<i>gṛhyābhiṣeka</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	Purification of the palace with water from the <i>rudrābhiṣeka</i>
13	<i>vaitaraṇīdāna</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> R <i>Bhaṭṭa</i> priest of <i>Vāsukimandir</i> (<i>pretatva</i>)	
13	<i>kapilādāna</i>	R <i>mūlapurohita</i> (<i>pretatva</i>)	
13	<i>pañcadhenudāna</i>	R <i>mūlapurohita</i> (<i>pretatva</i>)	
13	<i>daśadāna</i>	R 10 <i>brāhmaṇas</i> (<i>pretatva</i>)	given in cash
13	<i>padadāna</i>	R 13 <i>brāhmaṇas</i> (<i>pretatva</i>)	
13	<i>śayyādāna</i>	R <i>mūlapurohita</i> (<i>pretatva</i>)	'bed-gift' along with a golden image of <i>Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa</i>

13	<i>bhojana</i>	R <i>mūla-/rājapurohitas</i> , further brahmins involved, family members, officials	invitation cards were distributed
13	<i>durmānaśānti</i> (includes gift of the Bhāgavatapu- rāṇa)	R brahmin	The only ritual additionally performed for the untimely/ unnatural death of the kings
11, 30, 45ff to 389	<i>uttamaṃ ṣoḍaśam</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretatva</i>	16 <i>piṇḍas</i> offered within one lunar year (with the <i>adhikamās</i> of 30 days completed after 390 instead of 360 lunar days)
After one year	<i>ābdika-śrāddha</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i>	The <i>pretatva</i> attains the state of an ancestor
Every year	<i>ekoddiṣṭa-śrāddha</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i>	Annually performed in honour of one's forefathers up to three generations

After the completion of the first year, besides the *ekoddiṣṭa* a number of further memorial *śrāddhas* will be performed according to a monthly or yearly schedule.

This table brings together the rituals performed separately for King Birendra and Dipendra. It reflects the ideal day-to-day pattern and does not take into account the adaptations required for the 12th and 13th days. The ritual elements, which were kept from outsiders, have been completed according to the information provided by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita, Joint Secretary of the Darbar *rājapurohitas*.

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